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Sent: Thur 8/6/2015 7:43:26 PM
Subject: FYI: Breaking news EPA says contamination coming from Gold King Mine

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20150806/NEWS01/150809765/River-users-warned-of-mine-waste-approaching-Durango->

River users warned of mine waste

EPA says contamination coming from Gold King Mine

By [Shane Benjamin](#) Herald staff writer

Article Last Updated: Thursday, August 06, 2015 11:35am

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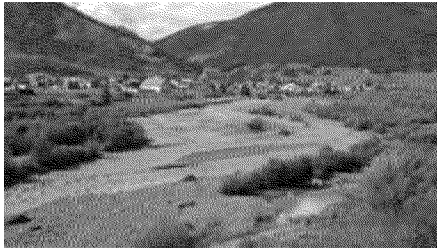


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Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

Contaminated water from a blowout at the Gold King Mine above Silverton turned the water orange-brown Thursday morning in the Animas River at Bakers Bridge.

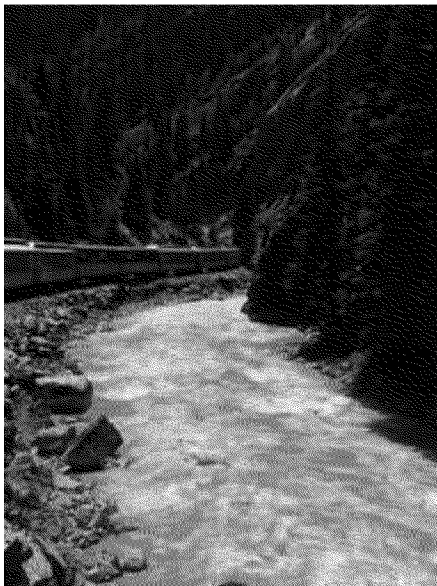
Animas River users are being advised to stay off the water today until contaminated water from a mine mishap above Silverton has passed through Durango.



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Courtesy of Michael Constantine

An orange-colored discharge of sediment and minerals makes its way down the Animas River-Cement Creek junction about 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in Silverton, about eight miles downstream from a blowout at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County. The contamination had made its way to Bakers Bridge in La Plata County as of Thursday morning.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Courtesy of Jill Womack

Jill Womack was riding the train from Silverton to Durango yesterday and captured the toxic waste spill into Cement Creek, which feeds into the Animas River. More than 1 million gallons of mine waste water leaked from Gold King Mine on Wednesday. The waste is in the Animas River and headed downstream.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

Rayna Willhite, of Aztec, holds a bottle of water collected from the Animas River on Thursday near Bakers Bridge. The river is carrying mine waste from the Gold King Mine north of

A Call Center has been set up for the public at 385-8700. As additional information is received, it will be posted to the La Plata County website at www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook.

The accident occurred about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County. A mining and safety team investigating contamination at the mine triggered a large release of mine wastewater into the upper portions of Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River, according to a news release issued by the Environmental Protection Agency.

La Plata County emergency workers discouraged any recreational activity on the river until the plume has passed. They also encouraged ranchers to keep pets and livestock away from the river.

"Because of the discoloration, we don't want people in the river," said Butch Knowlton, the county's director of Emergency Preparedness. "It's really, really ugly. Any kind of recreational activity on the river needs to be suspended."

The city of Durango stopped pumping water out of the Animas River on Wednesday to make sure none of the waste could be sucked up into the city reservoir.

However, the Animas is an important secondary source of water for the city during the summer and residents need to conserve as much water as possible over the next few days until the water in the Animas is safe to use.

"It's a very important water source in the summer. I can't keep enough water in the reservoir with it," said Steve Salka, the city's utilities director.

During the emergency, Salka is not going to be sending raw water to Fort Lewis College or Hillcrest Golf Course. The city also will not be watering any of the parks for the next three days to help conserve, he said.

On a hot summer day, the city can use up to 9.2 million gallons a day. But the city can pump only 5.3 million gallons a day out of the Florida River.

Right now the city reservoir is about 4.5 feet below capacity, he said.

"This couldn't happen at a worse time for me, so I have to be really cautious," Salka said.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife planned to put fish cages with fish in the Animas River to monitor what happens to them, said spokesman Joe Lewandowski.

"We'll see if those fish survive," he said. "We're also monitoring to make sure we don't get infiltration into the hatchery, because that could be a problem."

Local officials have asked all agricultural water users to shut off water intake.

The mishap released about 1 million gallons of acidic mine water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River, according to the release.

The pulse of water had made its way to Bakers Bridge in La Plata County as of Thursday morning and was expected to pass through Durango about 3 p.m. Thursday.

La Plata County had not issued any health warnings as of 10:30 a.m. Thursday.

The discharge consists of water that was being held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal.

Several workers were at the site at the time of the breach; all were unharmed, according to the release.

Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment notified water users downstream of the release so they can take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes.

The EPA downplayed the potential effects on aquatic life, saying there is long-standing water-quality impairment issues associated with heavy metals in Cement Creek and upper portions of the Animas River. As a result, there is no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed, and fish populations have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton in the Animas River, the release said.

EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations over the next

several days to confirm the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users.

"This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the state of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites," said David Ostrander, director of EPA's emergency response program in Denver. "We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary."

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Richard Miller ·

[Owner](#) at [Self-Employed](#)

Trust us ---- we're with the gubment. Almost as laughable as "Hey y'all ---- watch this!" My hope is the mess isn't as bad as it looks ---- but frankly, I'm not feeling very optimistic about that.

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Chuck Bump ·

[California State University, Long Beach](#)

Rerun the story of when Lake Emma collapsed into a mine up there and did this to the Animas River about 25-30 years ago. Farmington acted like they had no warning and I believe it pretty much whiped out all the fish. This time it's the gov't's fault so everything will be fine! (sarcasm)

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Kelly Ritter ·

[Substitute](#) at [Durango School District 9-R](#)

I got on the river at 1030 am today at 32nd street and saw no posted warnings about this. Since they knew it was coming since Wednesday it seems like they ought to have had time to keep people off the river today. I stopped at oxbow and read this article and booked it down river back to the car. Orange bubbles spotted from oxbow to 32nd at 1130am. Reached 32nd by noon and say 25 or more getting tubes and rafts ready to float. Still no posted warning at 32nd by 1230pm. EMTs came to give a warning to people at the launches at that time but they did not have anything to post.


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[Cale Rogers](#) ·

[Durango, Colorado](#)

Interesting they say "because of discoloration, they don't want people in the river." I'd be more concerned about the toxic heavy metals, and acid that's been plugged for the last 24 years. This will destroy the already poor water quality of the animas, and I really hope it's the last straw to get the mines in Silverton cleaned up, for good.

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[Markus Meier](#) ·

[Pagosa Springs, Colorado](#)

It's not done to just let the water pass and feel safe after that. This toxic water will contaminate the ground water and the dirt around it will keep and slowly release this pollution for a long time. Is EPA blind?